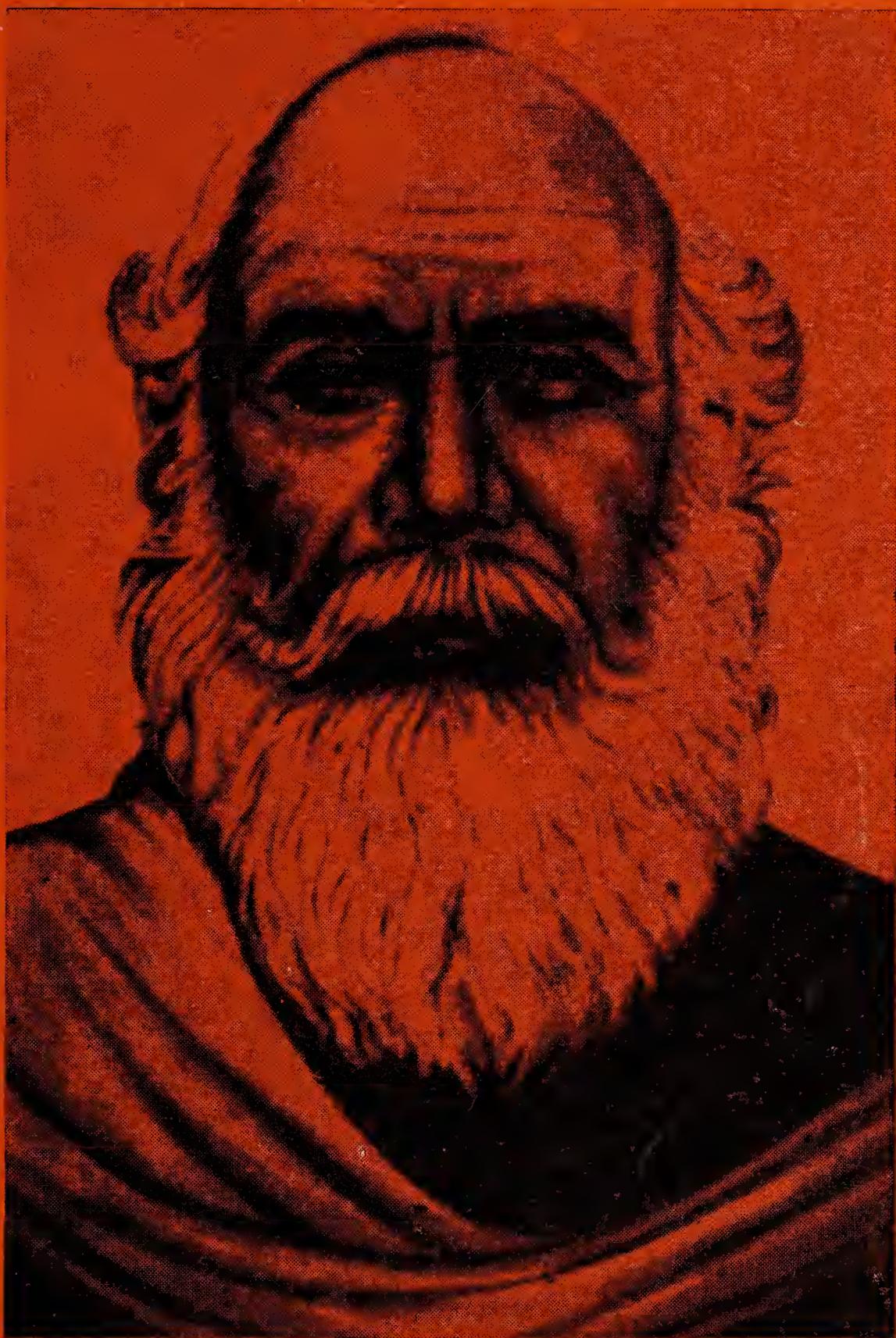


BABA KANSHI RAM

PROF. NARAIN CHAND PARASHAR



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PROF. NARAIN CHAND PARAHSAR

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PREFACE

Baba Kanshi Ram popularly known as Pahari Gandhi was a veteran freedom fighter who made the supreme sacrifice in fighting against the foreign rule. He was also a great social reformer and a poet.

Coming of a poor family of a village Padhyoli near Dada Siba in district Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, Kanshi Ram was a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He suffered all hardships and privation as did other freedom fighters.

The biography written by an eminent scholar will rekindle in us the spirit to preserve the hard won freedom by maintaining peace, amity and integrity for strengthening the country which had been exploited for centuries by imperialist power by adopting the policy of divide and rule.

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CHAPTER I

Early years

GREAT WAS THE excitement at Gaihdiala, a small village in Hoshiarpur District of Punjab in the month of September 1937. The occasion—a political Conference being organised in the lap of the famous mountain range—the SHIWALIKS—just in the sight of the snowline—by the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee. It was to be addressed by Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the acknowledged leader of the Indian resurgence and struggle for freedom. A short statured man from the neighbouring Kangra District—now in Himachal Pradesh but then an integral part of Punjab was busy making arrangements for the Conference, as he was to play a key role in its organisation, having been acknowledged the leader of freedom fighters in the hilly regions of Punjab and its neighbouring hill states of Jammu, Bilaspur, Mandi, Suket and Chamba to name only the major ones.

This man, Kanshi Ram, was the man of the masses, who organized this famous event in the foothills in the month of September 1937. It saw him at the height of his activity in the Conference. Visibly moved by his passionate love for freedom, his commitment to the Congress ideology and his dedication to the service of hilly areas, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru is reported to have called him "Pahari Gandhi". The title catapulted Kanshi Ram to new heights of fame and glory. But it also earned him the wrath of the rulers, who were bent upon crushing this crusader in the hills and vales of Kangra and Hoshiarpur. But more of this later.

Kanshi Ram was born in a poor Brahmin family in Tika Padhyal, Mauza Gurnwar, a small village, near Dada Siba, in Tehsil Dehra of Kangra District. The village is located close to the banks to the River Beas which acquires slow pace after gushing through the rocky heights of Rohtang Pass and Kulu Valley and located nearly 30 kilometers from Dehra Tehsil (now Sub-Divisional Headquarters of Kangra District). Dada Siba was wrapped up in forests and was not connected by any metalled or even motorable road in those days. It was, however, the main village in the princely state of that name. It was here that Kanshi Ram was born to Pt. Lakhnoo Ram Pahda and Smt. Rewati Devi on 11 July 1882. His parents were religious minded village folk. Pt. Lakhnoo Ram was a priest as is clear from the surname Pahda and used to earn his living by priest-craft, which was as uneconomic in those days in the rural areas as it is today. But, then, it had a lot of prestige attached to it as the priest not only catered to the religious and social needs but also was able to prophesy the future and sometimes help the sick by guessing the likely date of recovery from illness, in addition to forecasting the time of rain and drought. He was also able to indicate the favourable and the unfavourable periods and dates for various vocations and activities in human life.

Kanshi was only 14 years when his father Pt. Lakhnoo Ram died and it was his uncle Pt. Makhnu Ram, who undertook to lookafter the young boy. The early days were spent in the very rural setting. As Pt. Lakhnoo Ram had lost his two sons in their youth, so young Kanshi Ram became the focus of his affection and he tended him with care. Before his death, however, Pt. Lakhnoo Ram had arranged to marry his son Kanshi to Smt. Saraswati Devi, when he was only 8 years of age and his bride only 5 years. The only primary school in the area for miles around—at Dada Siba, catered to the educational need of young Kanshi Ram. Urdu and Persian were the languages taught in the schools of Punjab in those days, and Kangra District

was no exception. It was thus here that young Kanshi, who was a voracious reader, fell in love with two famous classics of Sheikh Sadi, the famous Persian poet—Gulistan-e-Sadi and Bostan-e-Sadi. As the maternal grand father of young Kanshi was attached to the establishment of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, so the desire to visit Lahore, was only natural. He took to reading religious literature, especially the Gita and music from early childhood. As he was endowed with a sweet and melodious voice, so singing folk and religious songs were his popular hobbies in those days.

After completing his initial education, he left for Nurpur, which was a flourishing town in those days, because of its vicinity to Pathankot and on account of its being the gateway to Kangra Valley and became the Mushi (Clerk) of a pleader. The atmosphere of the court was, however, not conducive to his mental growth and he left for Lahore, the Capital of Punjab, and a great centre of cultural and political activity around 1900.

The arrival in Lahore in his adolescence was the opening of a new dawn for young Kanshi. It was as if a young lion had come out of a den and was entering the wide forest. He came across other youngmen from his district, who were driven to serve as domestic servants on account of their poverty at home. These young boys—MUNDUS—or more precisely—Pahari MUNDUS—as they were called had a world of their own. Condemned to a life of indigence at home and servitude in cities like Lahore and Amritsar, these boys had hardly any moment of joy in their life of drudgery. As there was little schooling at home, so there was hardly any chance of passing even a Middle Standard Examination—not to speak of Matriculation—at any stage in their lives. But they were able to steal an hour or two from drudgery and gather in parts or playgrounds in these cities, sing songs in Pahari to the glory of hills and vales. It was here that young Kanshi's poetic

imagination was inspired by the yearning for the lovely hills and murmuring streams of his native Kangra region. But alas : they also took note of the tragedy in the lives of those who remained behind at home and who had been subjected to exploitation by the more wealthy Indians in general and the Angrez Sahibs in particular.

The young shepherd surveyed his flock and his heart bled in despair.

But the greater nationalistic urge to follow in the footsteps of great freedom fighters like Dada Bhai Nauroji and late Lajpat Rai, gave a new direction to his poetic genius. He decided to write-poems and songs to Pahari—his mother tongue about the patriotic themes. The mission to liberate the mother-land--the medium-poems and songs in Pahari.

It was not, however, his only method to arouse the conscience of his regional Pahari brethren. He also decided to associate himself with the leading national leaders, freedom fighters and Revolutionaries and in the process plunged into the freedom struggle heart and soul. The rigours of jail life, the pangs of separation from his young wife and aged mother, the bleak prospects of any source of income for the maintenance of his family were too insignificant to contain his turbulent river of energy and confine him to the narrow confines of a sheltered and well-regulated life of comfort or ease, pleasure or worldly success. The twin stars of the liberation of the motherland from the foreign yoke and the service to the mother tongue—pahari—and its literature were to regulate the whole course of his life in the years to come.

CHAPTER II

The adolescence and first arrest

THE COURSE OF young Kanshi's life was now determined and its direction was clear. In order to make his mark more effective, he utilised his stay at Lahore for mastering classical and folk music. He became the disciple of a master of classical music who used to live in Papar Mandi area of Lahore. Kanshi got a job with Karam Chand Thapar and started living in Dhobi Mandi. During these days young Kanshi Ram's sister Smt. Rama Devi was married to Pt. Bansi Ram of a village near Dharamsala Mahantan in the then Tehsil of Hoshiarpur District. Yet she too expired soon after her marriage. Coming soon after the death of his father, this tragic incident cast a deep gloom on his mind. Occasionally he would visit his village Dada Siba and renew his contacts with his friends.

In the year 1905, a severe earthquake shook Kangra District. Kanshi Ram accompanied Lala Lajpat Rai and visited the villages wrecked by the earthquake. During the next five years (1905—10) he met Lala Hardayal, the doyen of Indian Revolutionaries and was much impressed by his simple living and high thinking. The name of Lala Hardayal was a name to conjure with. He was regarded as a wizard—a prodigy, a genius all rolled into one. He was famous for doing so many things at a time—listening to music, playing chess, memorising speeches word by word and translating from one language to another without any difficulty. The parents loved to call their children Hardayal for the simple reason that Hardayal had become a symbol of scholarship, bold leadership and intense patriotism.

In addition to Lala Hardayal's influence, young Kanshi Ram came under the impact of S. Ajit Singh, Martyr Bhagat Singh's uncle and Sufi Amba Prashad of Vachhowali Mandi, and Barkat Ullah; Lal Chand Falk, the writer of the famous song "PAGRI SAMBHAL JATTA" also impressed him.

The holding of the Delhi Durbar in 1911-12 in Delhi was a major event in India, as it attracted the loyal Princes, Rajas, Maharajas, Nawabs and other prominent Indians ready to play second fiddle to the Britishers on the one hand and young revolutionaries on the other. Young Kanshi Ram witnessed the distribution of sweets by these hundreds of flatterers and courtiers determined to perpetuate the British regime in India—the beating of drums to the glory of the Empire as also the lightning move of the revolutionaries in bombing the carriage of the viceroy—Lord Harding who fortunately escaped. The greatest show of glory and power had received the severest jolt.

The incident brought a chain of repressive measures in its wake on the innocent citizens and the suspects without distinction, in addition to a crackdown on the revolutionaries and the freedom fighters. The incidents are described in a powerful Pahari poem by Kanshi Ram entitled "GHUMI KARI DIKHIA" (As He Watched Around). Master Karam Chand, Avadh Bihari and Bhai Balmukand were arrested soon after 23 December 1912. The Delhi Conspiracy case was instituted and Master Amir Chand and Avadh Bihari were hanged on 8 May, 1915. Bhai Balmukand was hanged on 15 May 1915 in Delhi which had earlier witnessed the martyrdom of Bhai Mati Das for his refusal to embrace Islam. Basant Kumar, another accused kissed the gallows on 11 May 1915 at Ambala Central Jail. Kanshi Ram had to go underground for a number of days to escape police harassment and repression. While he was witnessing the enactment of this tragic drama in the life of revolutionaries and patriots, his own family life was under

heavy strain. He was blessed with a son in 1913, who was named Gian Chand. Four years later in 1917 came another son Swaya Ram. Kanshi Ram's young partner in life Smt. Saraswati Devi breathed her last at Lahore in 1918, leaving Swaya Ram a young baby of 10 months. After the death of his wife Kanshi Ram went to his village. But here too tragic deaths in the family were to haunt him in the face. During one day four members of this joint family died. The village lost nearly forty persons in a short span of a month and the young poet recorded the deep tragic impact on his mind in a poem entitled "Dukhe de mane ch koi Reham ni hunda" (Tragedy does not spare any soul) and another poem "Dukh Kanen Sukh" (Sorrow and Happiness).

Kanshi Ram returned to Lahore soon after and opened a shop in collaboration with another partner, which flourised for sometime.

On the national scene these were the days when World War-I was engaging the attention of one and all. Mahatma Gandhi had just returned from South Africa and given a call to the nation to support the British Empire in its war efforts. He had been awarded "Qaisre-e-Hind" Medal for his efforts to help in the recruitment to the Armed Forces but the English had betrayed him after this victory on war and Rowlatt Act was passed in 1919. This invited a severe protest in the length and breadth of the Country. A pledge was taken by the people of Punjab against this Act on 28 February 1919 and a peaceful mammoth gathering of people at Amritsar was subjected to sudden firing by General Dyer resulting in the death of hundreds of people on 13th April 1919. The tragedy is known as "Jallian Wala Bagh Tragedy".

This tragedy shook the conscience of the nation but it sent severe tremors of shock and waves of anger in every nook and corner of Punjab. Kanshi Ram recorded his strong impression in a poem in Pahari. Gandhi Ji returned the 'Qaisre-e-Hind'

Medal on 1 August 1920 and the three stalwarts "Lal, Bal, Pal" commanded the heights of popularity at this juncture.

Kanshi Ram, who had returned to his village, plunged into the freedom struggle and was arrested in his home in August 1920, when he was performing the Fourth Death Anniversary Ceremony called 'Chaubarkh' as homage to his elder sister-in-law Smt. Lajwanti Devi. Kanshi Ram was taken to jail after he had been allowed to complete the religious rites, at the intervention of Raja of Dada Siba.

Perhaps, this was one of the first few arrests of a freedom fighter in this sub-mountainous region of Kangra-Hoshiarpur belt of Shiwaliks. In his diary Kanshi Ram, vividly recalls, how he was arrested and the police officers entered and occupied a cot in the school verandah. His young son Swaya Ram who only 3 year old, was standing close by—unable to decipher the goings on. The Police Officer gently pushed the lad into the father's lap, before taking him away to the jail. The arrest made in response to the call for Satyagraha was later followed by eight other prominent freedom fighters of Kangra District.

Kanshi Ram was taken to Dehra Gopipur, across the river Beas in a boat, escorted to the Police Station of Jwalamukhi, the site of the famous temple of goddess Durga and finally lodged in Dharamsala Jail. Lala Lajpat Rai, Punjab Kesri had already been transferred to this jail from MANDLAY jail in Burma. The nine heroes of Kangra—the freedom fighters—were lodged in Dharamsala jail.

CHAPTER III

The young worker and his diary

IN HIS DIARY written in Urdu, young Kanshi vividly records not only his activities for propagating the Congress ideology, but also gives a glimpse of the administrative culture of the Britishers as it developed and flourished in those days in these distant hills. Thus, he records that Tehsildar, Dehra, summoned all those involved in litigation to Dada Siba on 7 January 1922, yet he did not arrive there till evening. It rained for two days. No hearing was given on 8 January. Many people again turned up on 9 January and they were subjected to forced labour (begar). The labourers and tenants supplied firewood and other materials. They were subjected to beating many a time by the police, but never given anything to eat. Milk and curd was collected from the Zamindars (landowners) and it was only on 10 January that the Tehsildar held his court, when the Raja of Dada Siba also appeared on the scene and palanquins were provided to the Tehsildar and his escort by the Raja of Dada Siba. When the accounts were settled only Rs. 4/- to Rs. 5/- were paid by the Tehsildar. In return for this hospitality many fields were transferred in the name of Raja Sahib. A glimpse of cheap rates at which the various commodities were supplied for this purpose is also presented by Kanshi Ram. Lala Kirpa Ram Sud supplied sugar @ 3 seers for one rupee. Sugar was not available to the people at this rate. It was special concession to the Raja Sahib and the Tehsildar. Pulse (Urd) were supplied @ 8 seers for one Rupee.

The propagation of Congress ideology was not an easy task in these days. The young workers had to move from one

village to another on foot and sometimes they had to pay for their expenses from their own pocket, as the people who were afraid of the authorities did not provide any food or shelter to them. Thus, Kanshi records that on 13 January, 1922, he went to Kotla with Sant Ram and had to incur an expenditure of Re. one and four annas. A meeting was held at Kotla on 12 January. It was attended by 20 persons. The speeches centred around the need for abolishing BEGAR (forced labour) and echoed the resentment against the treatment meted out to India after the conclusion of World War-I. Swadeshi was preached. The meetings ended with solgans like "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai". Many songs in Pahari were sung and poems recited. Similarly, another such meeting held on 16 January attracted 150 people and foreign goods worth Rs. 20/- were consumed in fire called Holi. The native crafts were acclaimed. On 17th January one such meeting was held in village SIUL. The meeting was attended by 25 people and 5 persons enrolled themselves as members of the Congress.

It would be interesting to record that speeches made by him in those days were in Pahari. On 23 January, 1922, a meeting addressed at Dada Siba was as follows :—

"The Kite of the Government is flying high up in the sky. Its string is in the hands of a band of flatterers, who are unrolling the string with great fervour and passion, little realising that the string is not endless. When it is completely unrolled, they (the flatterers) cannot push the kite to any greater heights, rather it is likely to fall on the ground. The wind is changing direction. It is blowing in the reverse direction and there is not even an inch of string to unroll. Even if they hold the string fast it is of no use."

Friends and my dear brothers : the time is fast approaching when the kite would crash down, and the Government

would fall in a few days. All of you join and form Congress Committee in every Panchayat. Let this Committee resolve all disputes with consensus. Everybody knows the game of cards. Even one card with unit value (EKA) conquers a King. We also want to conquer the Kingdom with this basic unit—Village Congress Panchayat—Long Live Mahatma Gandhi".

The movement for setting up Congress Units had gathered momentum in these days as it helped the people in keeping them out of the clutches of the local administration. Young Kansi records in detail on how many occasions they helped the people by getting their cattle freed from the Phatak Authorities, who would take away the grazing cattle on the simple pretext of their having strayed into the Government or Forest land. Sometimes the resolution of such disputes was with the consent of both the landlord and the owner of the cattle who had no grazing land of his own.

Another popular theme utilized for strengthening the Congress and freedom struggle was the propagation of prohibition. For one such meeting, village Chanaur, in Tehsil Dehra, was the venue. Here the harms accompanying drinking were highlighted on 19th February, 1922. Thirteen members were enrolled for the Congress Party. At another such meeting in village Gurnwar held on the 21 February, CHAR-KHA attracted the attention and the use of Khadi was propagated, untouchability was condemned and plans for setting up 'national' schools were discussed. The Congress workers in these days were called up to do the following in addition to the things mentioned above:

- (i) Instil a sense of oneness and fraternity among all castes and set up a social service wing so as to help those adversely affected in times of disease, accidents or natural disasters;

(ii) contribute to the TILAK SWARAJYA FUND. Every member or sympathiser of the Congress Party would pay one per cent of his recurring income to this fund. Similarly, every State Unit would contribute a quarter of its monthly income to the All India Congress Committee as per decisions taken by A.I.C.C. in 1921. The decision would be reviewed or approved in the open session.

(iii) Congress workers should ensure all help to the families of those who give up Government jobs in response to the call given by the Party.

There is no doubt that all these activities undertaken by Congress were very popular. A grand Conference held at Haripur from 11 to 13 March 1922 drew four to five hundred people every day. People clad in Khuddar took pledges to boycott wine and courts. The people were unhappy to hear about the news of Mahatma Ji's arrest. At such meetings there were songs to the glory of Charkha, had special appeal for the audience.

One such popular song composed and popularised by Kanshi was called 'CHARKHA-NAMA', it ran as follows:

GHAREN	CHARKHE	DI LOR
SANJO	GANDHI	DI LOR
KEHNDIA	GANDHI	SIANA
CHHORO	PICHHLA	ZAMANA
LAGAO	IKATHE HI	ZOR
SANJO	GANDHI	DI LOR
KAPAH	BAHRON	LIOA
BELAN	GHAR DAR	BANAO
HOWE	DHUNKHI	DA ZOR
SANJO	CHARKHE	DI LOR
DESI	KAPRE	BANAYIYE
JE	SIALEN	HANDAYIYE
MALMAL	DENI	HUN CHHOR
SANJO	CHARKHE	DI LOR

DARIAN	KHES	BANAYIYE
DHOTI	TAULIYE	LAYIE
GHAREN	KHADDI	DI LOR
HUN	CHARKHE	DI LOR
GHANGI	CHARKHI	LIYAEN
MINJO	HUN NA	BULAYIN
KEHANDA	MAIN	HATH JOR
GHAREN	CHARKHE	DI LOR
JAHLU	CHARKHA	LEI LIYA
MAN	REHANDA	HI DULHYA
REHANDI	DIDAN	DI LOR
SANJO	CHARKHE	DI LOR
HATH	CHARKHE	NE HILLE
KHUN	JISMEN	CHE HILLE
HINDU	MUSLIM	BHAIYO
HUKAM	GANDHI	MANAO
MILLE	SURAJI	HI DOL
SANJO	CHARKHE	DI LOR
APNE	DHARAM	BACHARO
KEHANDA	KANSHI	PIARO
GHUNDI	DILLE	DI KHOL
SANJO	CHARKHE	DI LOR
GHAREN	CHARKHE	DI LOR

One popular technique of the Congress workers during these days was to impress upon the people the need to purify their hearts and wash away their sins on account of which the entire nation was subjected to slavery. Mahatma Gandhi was presented to the people as a great Vaidya—physician who would cure the people of these accumulated sins, provided they undertook the proper treatment prescribed by him as per a standard recipe, which is in line with the Ayurvedic traditions. The recipe was as under :

Leaf of Tarkib (reason)	1 tola
Ambla of faith	2 tolas
Bhera of Confidence	3 tolas
Saunf of wisdom	4 tolas
Honey of Fellow feeling	5 tolas

Grind it in the Ukhli with the stone of patience. Put it on the fireplace of dedication and heat it up with the fire of separation from beloved ones. Lift it up with the spoon of goodwill and gulp it down the throat. God willing the sins would be purified through this dose of medicine and the country would be free with this recipe of Mahatma Gandhi. Needless to say this was a very popular method of inculcating virtues and for undergoing suffering.



CHAPTER IV

In and out of jail with other colleagues

MENTION HAS BEEN made earlier of the first arrest of Kanshi Ram in 1920. A few more details of this event would bring out the impact in all its dimensions. After having been arrested at Dada Siba, he was handcuffed and taken to Dehra Gopipur in a boat across the river Beas. From there they marched to Police Station at Jwalamukhi and from this Police Station they went on foot to the District Headquarters at Dharamsala. Eight other freedom fighters of Kangra Distt. who joined him there were Comrade Ram Chandra who later became an M.L.A. Thakur Pancham Chandra of Nurpur. who became Minister in independent India, S. Pritam Singh of Kangra, Shri Sarv Mittar of Nadaun, Distt. Hamirpur, Pt. Milkhi Ram of Hamirpur, Shri Chet Ram of Mehal (Hamirpur), Lala Bashi Ram of Palampur.

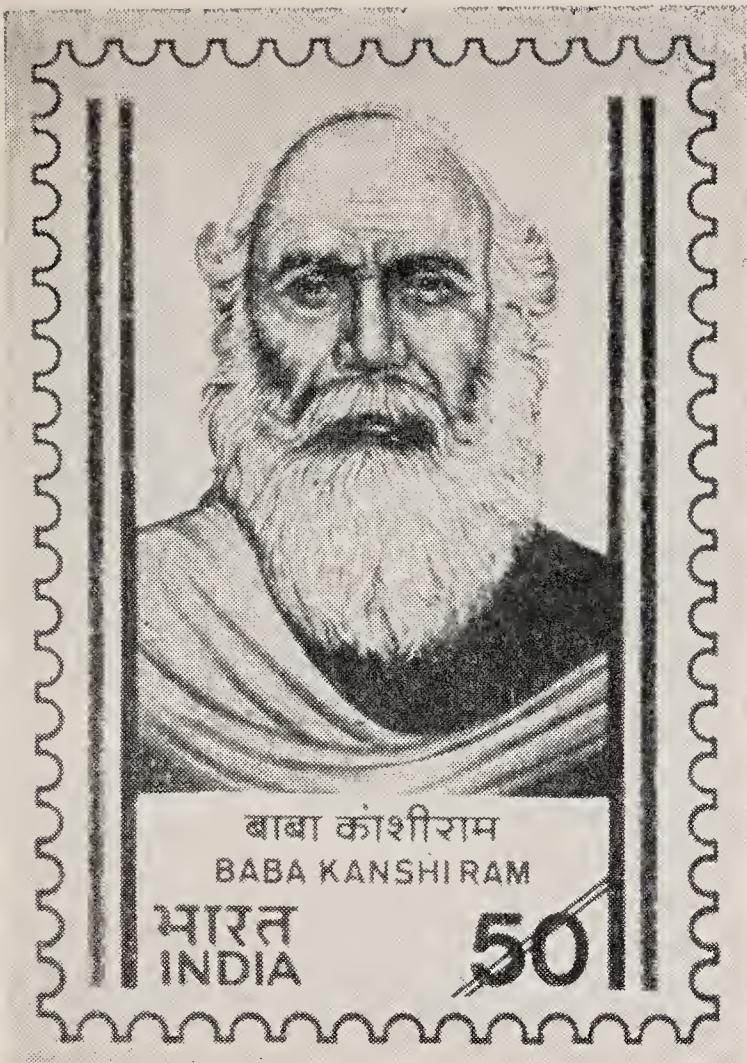
Lala Lajpat Rai had also been transferred to Dharamsala Jail from Mandlay in Burma. So here Kanshi Ram came into intimate contact with him. He welcomed the young freedom fighters from Kangra District especially Kanshi Ram, who was the first to be arrested and the first to arrive. Lala Lajpat Rai had thought that Kangra District might not throw up any freedom fighters into the lap of jails simply because of its extreme poverty and backwardness on the one hand and a poor communication among the people on the other. But he was delighted to see that the call of Mahatma Gandhi for Satyagraha had shook

the remotest corners of India—the hills and vales alike, irrespective of the linguistic, religious and caste differences. Like the glorious traditions of the Buddha the modern faquir had found a response from the rich and poor, high and low, men and women on an unprecedented scale. A youngman from village Kohla near Nadaun in Hamirpur Tehsil (now District), Sharam Singh gave up his job as clerk in the Post Office at Ambala to join the Satyagraha and thus joined the glorious mainstream of the national protest against the British Government.

In all Kanshi Ram visited Jail eleven times and the total span of over thirteen years spent in jails—Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur, Atak, Multan, Lahore and Ferozepur in addition to Dharamsala. His largest single tenure in jail was for 730 days which he has celebrated in a poem in Pahari entitled “730 days imprisonment with rigour”.

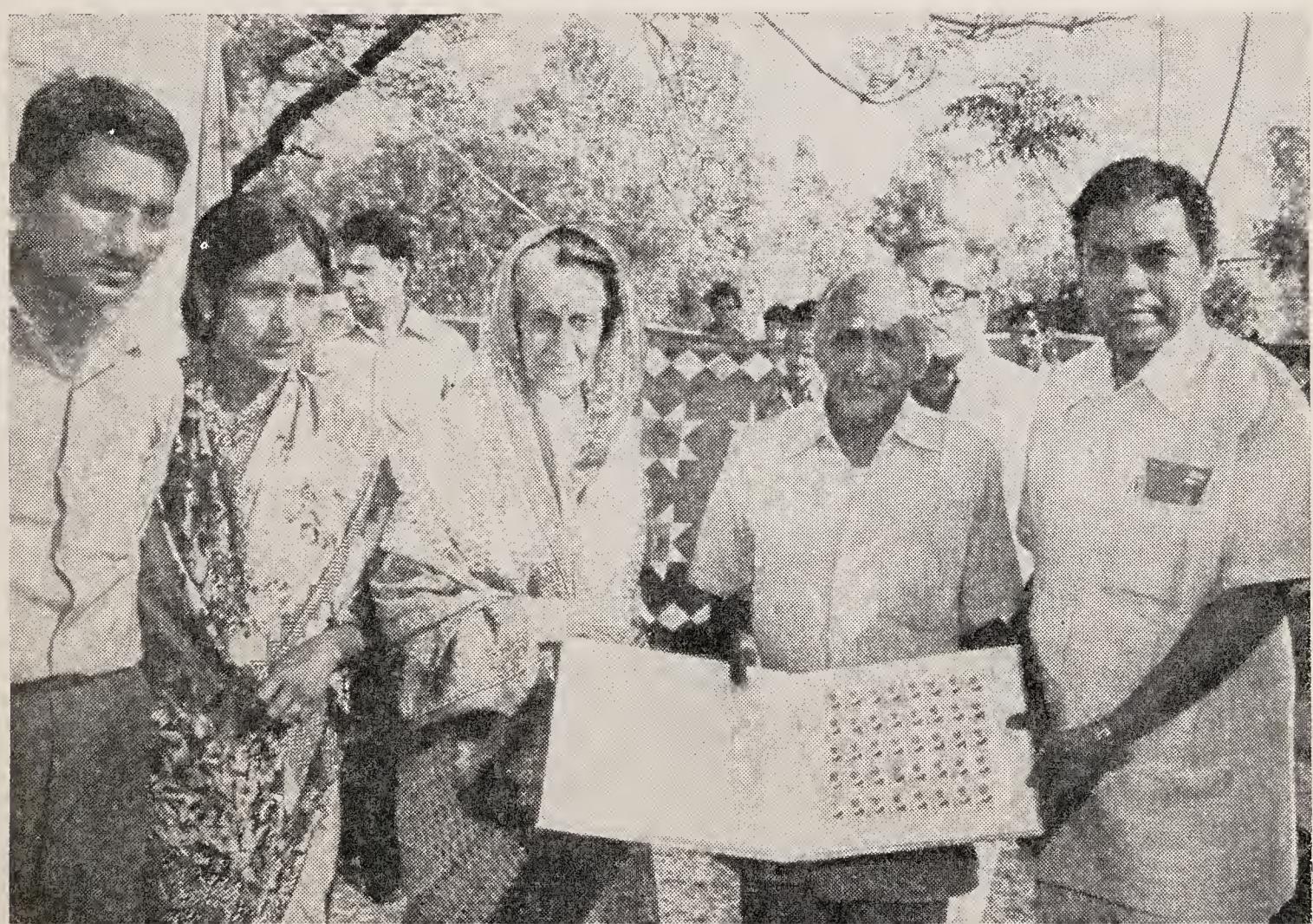
In this poem he inspires his colleagues to bear the trial and turbulations of jail life and exhorts them to be fearless. He challenges the Government of the day not to indulge in repression-warning them that their days in India are numbered. He also addressed his wife, in Heaven to bless him. Not only Smt. Saraswati Devi, but other Satis would shower their blessings from far away seven skies and inspire the freedom fighters to carry on the relentless struggle till it is crowned with success. Smt. Saraswati Devi in particular asks young Kanshi not to lose heart as she is there in Heaven to welcome him with garlands when he returns there to join her after a heroic struggle for freedom in India.

The jail life was an experience of rare suffering. Kanshi Ram was transferred to Gurdaspur jail from Dharamsala and he records some features of the life in jail. There was no distinction between those sentenced to jail on account of moral crimes and the political prisoners. They were not allowed to communicate



Facsimile of special multi colour stamp issued by P&T on 23 April, 1984 in honour of Baba Kanshi Ram.

Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi presenting an Album of the commemorative stamp to Shri Swaya Ram son of Baba Kanshi Ram at Jwalamukhi on 23 April, 1984. Prof. Narain Chand Parashar, M.P. Chairman Pahari Gandhi Birth Centenary Celebrations Committee is on extreme right.



with outside world freely and frequently. Every prisoner was given two postcards. Sometimes even this facility was refused on account of severe punishment. Two iron vessels were provided, one for taking food and the other for drinking water. Two earthen pots were provided for using to answer the calls of nature which were not removed from the cell for the whole day. The cell for sleeping was 8x6 feet wide. For the whole day the freedom fighters had to work at the grinding mill (CHAKKI). A wooden plank was put across the prisoners' neck and he was asked to join others frequently during the day in what was known as TAKHTI PARADE.

The harassment and the extreme physical and mental torture to which the Freedom Fighters were subjected can be gauged from one incident. One day Kanshi Ram had a tiff with the Superintendent of Jail, who was an Englishman. So, now the repression was let loose in full vigour. Kanshi Ram was tied to a Ber Tree in the jail. Handcuffs were put on him and his feet were chained and he was tied against this Ber Tree, so as to remain standing. It so happened that after sometime a moral convict saw that Kanshi Ram could not stand this torture. So he took pity on him and cut off the shackles. He requested everybody to keep this act a guarded secret. After sometime the Warden saw that Kanshi Ram was lying on the floor and not standing tied to the tree. He informed the Deputy Jailer, and the result was a severe cane beating of Kanshi Ram which resulted in his falling unconscious. He was rushed to hospital, where he was treated by Dr. Balmukand of Datarpur, a small town in Hoshiarpur District.

It was during this period that Kanshi Ram wrote his famous song :

**"Kanshi-eh-Kehnda
Je Gurdaspur Jela che rehnda**

**Kagaz Kutai Kari Deohri che behnda
Vahda-Suraj Mili Tan Janda”**

(Kanshi says that he lives in Gurdaspur Jail, he beats pulp for paper and sits in the corridor. He promises that he will leave the jail only when Swaraj comes).

During these days one convict had to go to Dharamsala. He carried a small letter from Kanshi Ram for delivering it to Lala Lajpat Rai. As soon as he got this letter Lala Ji asked the Deputy Commissioner Kangra to provide a cook to him and as he was lonely, so he wanted a poet and singer like Kanshi Ram who was living in Gurdaspur jail. Thus the transfer from Gurdaspur jail to Dharamsala jail was arranged by the British authorities. They could not see through this novel task of providing a cook to Lala Lajpat Rai. As soon as Lala Ji was released from jail, Kanshi was again transferred to Gurdaspur.

After completing his sentence, he was set free. When he reached Dada Siba again, he was a changed man. With long hair and flowing beard, a brass karmandal in his hand and a copy of the Bhagwatgita wrapped in cloth in his hand and also a mala of cotton with 108 beads—that was all he came along with from the jail to jump into public life again so as to strengthen the movement for independence.

Kanshi Ram was a trained political worker now. His fame had spread far and wide. Whereas previously the Administration took little note of his activities, his movements were carefully watched now. He was arrested in 1927 and again in May 1980 and lodged in Attack jail. On his release he started arranging political conferences to arouse the masses from deep slumber. One such conference was organised in village Dholbaha January, now in Hoshiarpur District, in 1931. Thakur Udhamp Singh had also worked hard for its success. It was attended by such humanities as principal Chhabil Dass, Dr. Kitchbas, Dr. Gopichand

Bhargava and Smt. Sita Devi, who later became a Member of Parliament. It was here that he recited his famous speech:

“Angrez Sarkara De Dhiga Par Dhiare” (The days of the British Empire are numbered).

The poem when recited again years later was to earn him the title of Pahari Gandhi at Garhdiwala in September, 1937 from no less a person than Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, as reported by Kanshi's compatriots.

Presently Kanshi was sentenced to two years of rigorous imprisonment on this score. He was again arrested a number of times. The last such sentence was in 1941. He could not complete the last sentence and was set free on account of his illness. It was after this release that he breathed his last in the village Dada Siba, wearing black clothes which he wanted to discard only after the dawn of independence. But this was not to be realised during his life time. The wearing of Black clothes is a historical event not only in his life, but also in the history of the freedom struggle of Himachal Pradesh. It steeled the determination of Kanshi and his colleagues there. Hence it is detailed hereafter.

CHAPTER V

The pledge of wearing black clothes

THE EXPERIENCE GAINED by Kanshi Ram in Political Conferences had enabled him to develop his own perspective regarding the future course of the freedom movement though he was deeply attached with the movement for passive resistance popularly known as Satyagraha, launched by Mahatma Gandhi—yet he had the heart of a revolutionary and there was no doubt in his mind that independence could not be achieved solely because of non-violence movement. Already he had been in touch with the leading revolutionaries of Lahore like Lala Hardyal, Bhai Bal-mukand and Sardar Ajit Singh.

It was at this time the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh shook the nation. The 23 March, 1931, the day of martyrdom for Bhagat Singh was also a turning point in the revolutionary movement. The failure of Mahatma Gandhi to save Bhagat Singh from gallows had cast a pall of gloom over the country and Bhagat Singh's name became a household word. An AICC session at Karachi was held under these circumstances.

The young patriots and the revolutionaries like Kanshi Ram in particular were disturbed and agitated as never before. So he returned to his village and arranged a public meeting at Dada Siba to lodge a strong protest against this heinous crime. Not only he expressed deep shock over this tragedy but also he decided to prepare for the long struggle ahead. The only way was to become a symbol of protest for every moment of life and

to this end he took a solemn pledge at the said meeting on 25 April 1931, one month after Bhagat Singh's martyrdom under the sacred 'Peepal tree' that he would wear black clothes throughout his life, till freedom was won for the nation. Alternatively, he would die in black clothes in the hope and faith that freedom would be won one day. The pledge speech which he delivered is as under :

Comrades !

Most of the people gathered here do want to know about the reasons for a Hartal in Dada Siba. I want to explain it in a few words. The young revolutionaries—S. Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev have been hanged on 23 March, 1931 at 7 P.M.

As a result of agitation throughout the country, the earlier date of execution was changed, but the appeals for sparing their lives fell on deaf ears. They were consequently hanged. To-day, the people of Dada Siba are observing a Hartal to mourn their death and to express sorrow and indignation for the Government action, for it is following a wrong course.

When Kamal Pasha had left Turkey, he had only 21 young-men with him and he had no belongings. The warrants of his death had been issued and he was chased. He could not be traced through the forests and the barrens were ransacked. As the times changed, the same Kamal Pasha swayed his people and became the Arbiter of Turkey's destiny.

Lenin had to flee from Russia, hiding himself in empty barrels of wine. Had he not fled, death was sure. But when the

times changed, the same Lenin fashioned the destiny of Russia. Shivaji Marhatta was regarded as a bandit, but when his fortunes had a turn for the better, the same Shivaji became Chhatrapati Shivaji. The Government of India too had to acknowledge him as such.

Lord Clive was an obstinate student, who had left all hope about his life and was hiding himself. But when events took a turn for the better, the same Clive became the founder of British Empire in India.

Sun Yat Sen was a rebel, who was on the run as the warrants of his death had been issued. At last when his fortunes had a turn for the better, the same Sun Yat Sen became the Commander of independent China.

Friends! no country has gained independence without sacrifice. India has offered many sacrifices so far and will do so in future and shall not lag behind any country. Now we are on the threshold of the dawn of freedom. Success shapes the man's destiny. In case of failure, the same man is doubted as a dacoit, thief, rebel, tyrant and King's enemy. Success transforms the same man as a kind hearted person giving justice to all the subjects and a saint.

Our young heroes, devotees of freedom, sacrificed themselves for the sake of Indian freedom and became martyrs for this cause and left us for ever.

We pray to God to send these revolutionaries to Heavens and may God bless all the parents of these martyrs with peace.

I, your comrade in arms, take this pledge of humble service in front of you that I shall wear black clothes till India attains independence.

It was this solemn pledge that made him almost run frantically from village to village throughout the hills and vales and sacrifice all comforts for all times. Not only this, he prepared himself to be forgetful of his children. The organisation of political conferences would be resumed as soon as he would come out of jail. In 1934 he had organised a political conference at Village Guglehar in Una District. In 1937 such conferences were organised at Nadaun and Sujanpur in Hamirpur tehsil (now district) which were attended by among others Dr. Satya Paul who became the Speaker of the Punjab after independence.

Kanshi Ram had the foresight to link political conferences with religious fairs and other cultural events. It was, therefore, with this end in view that he selected the annual Baisakhi Fair held at Kalesar in Pragpur Block of Dehra Tehsil but the greatest such conference was organised by him at Jawalamukhi in June 1940 where he trained a band of about 100 dedicated workers for the fierce struggle ahead. A photograph taken on this occasion with other trainees shows his dominating personality. One of the trainees Bhag Mall of Nadaun who is still alive vividly recalls the revolutionary fervour and the indomitable spirit which were dominating the life of Kanshi Ram. Wherever he moved, this tiger of the hills with a white flowing beard contrasting with his black clothes, singing the poems in Pahari—he was able to move the mountains and impress the masses. The hills of Himalayan and Shivalik valleys were reverberating with the revolutionary tunes and the country was in a ferment. Perhaps no other Congress leader of those days enjoyed such a vast sway over the people. It was, therefore, only natural that he should have soon been arrested by the Government. But whether in jail or outside Pahari Gandhi had become a name to reckon with. The indigent circumstances, therefore, which Kanshi Ram was passing could be seen from a letter dated 10 June 1941 which was written by Shri Krishna Chand Puri,

Secretary, District Congress Committee, Dharamsala to his younger son Swaya Ram. It reads as follows:

...“My dear Swai Ram,

The letter you had written to Baba Ji has been handed over to me. Perhaps you may be knowing that Baba Ji had been arrested at Dehra on 7-6-1941. Yesterday, i.e. on 9th June 1941 Baba Ji was produced in the Court. A hearing has been fixed for him on 26-6-1941. Dear brother when Baba Ji gave your letter to me for reading, then I felt stunned. One day when we started out for a meeting in a village he gave me your letter. He told me that he could not reply to your letter as he did not have enough money. At that time an envelope cost 5 paise. I felt so much distressed at that occasion as never before. But I also felt that the suffering can only be faced by a strong willed person”.

Another letter written by Kanshi Ram to his son on 18-8-1943 is also worth quoting. The letter is sent from Dada Siba to Swaya Ram who was living in Dalhousie in Distt. Chamba. It is written by Baba Ji after his release from jail and reads as follows :—

“My dear Swai Ram,

Do inform me about your well being every week. I have developed some stomachache. I have found even medicines to be of no use and the pain is hard to bear. I cannot move anywhere and am confined to bed. But don't worry. I won't die, rest assured.” . . .

Another letter written by him one month before his death throws flood light on the indomitable will that he possessed and the circumstances through which he was passing.

It is characteristic of Pahari Gandhi that he translated every suffering of his life and every moment of pain in his heart into poetic images. He describes beautifully how the poetic Muse churns his body and the sparks of revolutionary thoughts flash across mind.

**“Mane par kayee jhakhar uthdey.
Angan mereyan kulbul hunda.
Khialan wich dhuen uthde,
Bhanti badan de chhayee jande o’**

**Phiri dardan de paharan kane
Takrai jande O’**

**Tan Anjuan di Barkha lagi jandi.
Bundan boondan jami kane
Rup akhran da bani janda O.’**

(My mind is disturbed by many a thought.
My limbs tremble with passion and anger.
My thoughts rise like spirals of smoke.
And cover the mind like clouds in the sky
The thoughts then dash against the mountains of pain.
The tears roll up in the eyes.
And then tears melt into showers.
Every drop gets frozen and assumes the shape of poetic words).

CHAPTER VI

The poet

IT IS DECIDEDLY too difficult to pronounce any judgement at the present juncture whether Pahari Gandhi's stature was higher as a freedom fighter or as a poet. Be that as it may, it is safer to assume at the moment that he will be remembered long on both the scores. While on the one hand his struggle and sacrifice for freedom threw him headlong into the whirlpool of political activity, his passion for Pahari --his mother-tongue-kindled the fires of passion in him to a remarkably strong degree. Though he utilised poetry to carry forward his task of arousing the conscience of the people for launching and carrying on the struggle to throw away the foreign yoke, yet he also wrote poetry to unburden his soul.

The poet in young Kanshi looked across the centuries and peeped into the past. He saw the grave injustice to Kunal, the famous son of Ashoka, who suffered for his loyalty to the father. The young queen of Ashoka wanted to make him the target of her carnal desires, yet the young prince would regard and respect her as his mother. Kunal's eyes were taken out and he became blind for the whole of his life. It was here that Kanshi recognised the hero on whom he would shower full praise. Unmindful of the consequences and unaware of the pitfalls that lurk in the future. Kanshi's Kunal is the tallest historical figure in Pahari narrative poetry. Perhaps it was in him that Kanshi recognised a man dedicated to the cause of duty. "Kunale Di Kahani Kanshi Di Zabani" is thus not only a historical poem but also a clarion call to the men and women of his times to stick steadfastly to the task of liberating

Mother India. The poem has a symbolic value. It represents the struggle for freedom in essence and the queen is the British Government that blinds a nation to satisfy its carnal desires and exploits it to the full to satisfy the personal desires.

If "Kunal-e-di-Kahani", represents the freedom struggle symbolically, it is "SAMAJ NI ROYA" that represents Kanshi's call for social justice.

The young mother has no milk to offer to the new born child. She is so hungry herself that her breasts have gone dry. The little baby clutches at her breasts, but there is no milk. The mother tries to placate the child again and again. Tears well up in her eyes at her helplessness. The child also cries for want of milk. But the world at large—the society—moves on unmindful of the wants, cares and cries of small babies and dry mothers. The poem is a powerful satire on the indifference of the rich and an ironical comment on the helplessness of the poor. Is it not a clarion call for social justice symbolically ?

The call of the Motherland to work for throwing away the foreign yoke had stirred the deepest chords of young Kanshi's heart. His powerful poem "NANA JI KI KAHANI" presents us a galaxy of freedom fighters who move on to the stage to give the messages of their lives from the hoary periods of a by-gone age. Not only the historical figures like Nana Farnavis, Jhansi Ki Rani and others came out in sharp contours even the villages of India thick with life and struggle had come to life. We can have a glimpse of the powerful accents:

**NIKKA DEHA PIND THA OH :
NIKKE NIKKE TAPRU THE
KHAR UNHAN PAR PIYA THA :
KACHAN TUTIAN PANGDANDIAN
UNHAN TAPRAUN KI LAJ BACHANE JO
CHARO PASE RUKHAN DA VAN THA :**

(It was a small village indeed
 Small in size were all hamlets
 Thatched they were with dry grass
 Small and winding paths kept the hamlets at a distance
 And so did the forest of trees hide
 The poverty and helplessness of the village)

But it was out of such homes and hamlets that the young-men came out to fight freedom and sacrificed their lives .

US PINDE de Kitne diye
Azadiya di shama par joti jagayo,
Chaldiya Phirdiya zinda lashan
Sundure mityan mitiyan javaniyan
Namorian Jhuiran paycean Ammon
Azaadiya di kurbani dene us pinde Rehigyan
Marhiya Sahiullu bolde
Daren Phiranjiyan sab dar band they

How many lamps (Youngmen) from this village sacrificed themselves at the altar of freedom ?

Young women, recently married, remained no more
 That corpses with their shadows
 The Mothers with the old and wrinkled faces
 Along with young pale brides symbolic of
 The sacrifices this village made for freedom
 The village is silent like a graveyard
 Fear of the Britishers makes them lock the door
 Even during the day !

But Kanshi was not born to give the message of despair. For him even death was just a welcome step. His wife had breathed her last so many years ago leaving behind young children.

He imagines that the dedicated wives like his own, shower their blessings from heaven.

That was, however, a series of suggestive themes he developed to arouse the masses. The people should realise that but for an end to exploitation at foreign hands there was no escape. In a stirring call to the people of Kangra he says:

**"Pahariyan di mari gayi mat loke
Ujari Kangrra des jana
Lakhe da hoyi gaya kah loko
Uji Kangra des Jana**

(The people of the hills have lost their wisdom
Kangra des will be desolate.

The wealth of lakhs has been reduced to ashes
(Through exploitation by foreigners Kangra des will be desolate).

Again the theme of poverty stricken faces was to haunt young Kanshi time and again :

**NIKKE NIKKE MAHNUAN JO DUKH BARA BHARA
MILDI IN ROTI HUNDA NI GUZARA**

(The poor youngmen from hills have to suffer a lot
They cannot make their both ends meet !
This is cause of deep shame and sorrow !)

The chief characteristic of his poetic art is the simplicity of language and style used by him to arouse powerful images. He was a great painter of the scene of helplessness of poverty on the one hand and a hero calling for these poor men and women to rise to the occasion and sacrifice their all for the sake of motherland.

The economic and social life of these days can just be summed up by the poems written by Pahari Gandhi asking the young child not to insist on accompanying his father who is going to far away cities to earn his livelihood and send home some money which he saves in these cities :

**NA KAR O MUNDUA GALLIAN GHAREN JANE DIYAN
MAIN JANA, STABI ANA**

**TIJO BAJI LIANI O !
 CHHAIL CHHAIL KAPRE
 KALE BUTAN RA JORA
 MUHUEN NE BAJANE ALA BAJA
 BATNA ALI PHATUHI LIANI O :**
 (O my son do not insist on accompanying me
 I have to go but I will return soon.
 I will bring sweets for you.
 Fine clothes and a pair of black boots.
 Shall I also bring
 The music instrument
 And waist coat with buttons in addition
 Will I bring !)

As a poet, then, Kanshi Ram emerges as a crusader against slavery, exploitation and poverty. He also assumes the responsibility of resuscitating India's past heritage and links the bygone past to a living present so as to mould the future of his dreams. He might thus appear to be moralist a poet with a purpose. However, we can also have the glimpse of Kanshi in the master-painter of the various ironies of nature and man to complete the setting.

Poems and political themes did not however, cover the entire range of the poetic play of his genius. He also discovered the extreme social and economic injustice which brought about the degeneration of society. This can be adequately illustrated by his famous short poem 'Samaj Ni Roya' (The Society Did Not Weep) in which a young mother is unable to stop her child from crying as she has no milk in her breasts. Whereas a few people are rolling in luxury and indulging in huge waste on one side, the millions are passing through penury unable to get even the basic necessities of life.

Soaring in his vision into the realms of the past, he found good theme in the story of Kunal, the youngest son of King

Ashoka the Great who refused to satisfy the unnatural instincts of his own step-mother and was thus blinded at her behest. Perhaps, Kanshi Ram discovered in this the symbolic exploitation and blinding of India by the British Empire. The other religious themes, he took up for poetic treatment, are the devotion of 'Sidh Baba Balak Nath' and goddess 'Durga', the two popular deities of hill people.

Looking beyond the spheres of religion and society, Kanshi discovered the intrinsic irony and basic dichotomy in the entire cosmic plan as reflected in the realm of nature, as can be observed from a study of his short poem 'Nokhi Gall'—(Strange situation)- which can be given in full to bear out the point:

**"Parmatme Chandne Da Rukh Banaya
 Khushboo Ditti-Par Usjo phal ni ditte
 Istriya Jo Sundar Banaya Par Tisa Jo
 wafa de phulle bajh rakhya,
 Alman Fazilan jo maya ni ditti—Pata Ni Seh
 Phiri kiya kari dinde
 Kavian-Je Likhariyan jona mukneaali
 muhabbat ditti—
 Kanne Kanshi galanda,
 Assan Jo gharibia rajayee ditta
 (God fashioned the sandal tree,
 Blessed it with fragrance but not with fruit,
 He adorned the maiden with beauty,
 But gave her no fidelity,
 He gave the scholars and the wise no wealth
 Who knows what would they have done with it,
 He gave the writers and poets boundless love
 And says Kanshi to him
 God gave extreme poverty).**

That a beautiful and fragrant tree like 'chandan' should have no flowers and fruits, was as ironical a situation as the

one obtaining in our social order where the talented and gifted are denied any wealth at all, though they possess boundless love and compassion.

Kanshi's comment in his own case that he was given one thing to the full—in boundless measure-extreme poverty is also a subtle satire on the cosmic plan. Here is also subtle satire on the indigence befalling him.

The poem reveals the sharp eyed realist that he was in addition to being a spectator of the goings on of life over which we can only wonder, if not despair.

The painter of scenes, the lover of life as young Kanshi was, he also had a sharp eye for detail and its context. Marching across the hills and vales of Shiwaliks—sometimes rushing on to villages near the snow line, in the Himalayas—he must have been struck by the beauty of nature and the poverty of man. This steep contrast must have sharpened his vision and sometime saddened his heart. He must have noted the waste by the few rolling in riches and authority and the starvation and the want of the many, roaming in search of livelihood, far and wide from pillar to post.

A keen observer of the sentiments and feelings of the people, he must have measured his life against the troubles and tribulations of times and steeled himself to bear new responsibilities in the course of his youth and towards the decline of his life, in such popular poems as 'Chatru Kanen Reshmu' Zulfi Kanen Sheelan' 'Chanchlo kanen kunju' seems to have mastered the art of folk lore to his advantage.

Not content with goings on of political and economic struggles and extremely distressed over the ironies of nature and society, Kanshi Ram had also turned--and that too most effec-

tively—to the universal themes of love and beauty, brightened sometimes by the hopes of union with the beloved and darkened at others by lengthening shadows of despair over impending separation. His famous poem 'Doli Chukde Kaharo—Hauli Chalo'—(Deart planquin-bearers, slow down your steps)—is symbolic of the longing of a lover over the departure of his beloved within his very presence. The pathos in the situation is too obvious to be missed. The pangs of separation are too real and sharp to be forgotten but there can be at least a glimmer of hope in this world of fleeting joys and ephemeral desires that if the palanquin bearers slow down their steps, perhaps he may be able to have yet another glimpse for a few moments more and perhaps she may turn to look back. The poem commands comparison with Robert Browning's "The Last Ride Together", where Browning would imagine that even though they are having the last ride, the short union may become eternity if 'the world ends tonight'. Kanshi is content with a fleeting glimpse and would never wish the world to end even though his beloved is being carried away. One may ask whose love is more genuine and pure—that of Browning, who would prefer his own happiness to everything else or that of Kanshi Ram, who would wish a bright future to the departing beloved at the stroke of destiny and wished it otherwise than unite them, but who would be content to embalm his tender feelings simply by a glimpse of his parting beloved by persuading the palanquin-bearers to slow down their steps.

CHAPTER VII

Literary craftsman

IN ADDITION TO being a poet, who utilized the existing literary form like ballads, lyrics, poems in blank verse, etc., Kanshi Ram also introduced new forms of poetry, which were in line with the folk forms. Just as it is common to compose and write a Vahre on the occasion of marriage extolling the virtues not only of the bride and bridegroom, but also their parents, ancestors and close relatives, similarly on the occasion of death of near and dear ones, Sundra, some sort of Eulogy, was composed and read on the ceremony marking the close of funeral rites. Young Kanshi Ram wrote Sundre on the occasion of deaths of not his relatives, but important leaders. His Sundra on the death of Lala Lajpat Rai is well known. He extolls the virtues of not only the Lion of Punjab, but also laments the fact that after him the North-Western India would be leaderless. He mentions the name of Dr. Satya Paul, who later became the Speaker of Punjab Vidhan Sabha after partition, as one of his possible successors. As has already been observed Kanshi Ram was deeply influenced by the martyrdom of S. Bhagat Singh and he has also written a Sundra on the occasion.

Another familiar form of lyrical poem composed on the occasion of marriage was called Ghori, in which the exploits of the bridegroom were highlighted and he was painted as a warrier battling against heavy odds, but ultimately kissed the bride. It was a symbolic representation of the man of action realising his ideal inspite of innumerable obstacles and

tedious tests of valour and fortitude. Bhagat Singh's martyrdom galvanized Punjabi, Hindi and Pahari poets. So Ghoris were written in all these languages painting Bhagat Singh as the bridegroom and the gallows as the bride, whom the great martyr ultimately kissed.

Not to lag behind Kanshi Ram wrote Ghori in Pahari extolling the virtues and highlighting the heroic struggle of not only Bhagat Singh, but also Rajguru and Sukhdev, who were also his companions.

The third poetic genre of a lyrical variety which Kanshi Ram perfected was 'JHANJUTI'—a form of a lyrical romance in which the lover sends a message across the hills and vales to his beloved who is supposed to be far away, unable to see him in person, but none the less on deep spiritual communication with him. The message would generally reflect his desire to spurn all earthly belongings even his high relationship with nobility for the hand of the beloved. Sometimes, the heroine herself took the initiative and flash this message and the hero would be at the receiving end. Jhanjotis are short in length so that they can be sung by group of people on festive occasions, like marriage feasts, village fairs, long pilgrimage journeys.

Kanshi Ram's discerning eye also discovered the potentialities of 'JATRA SONGS', which people would sing while undertaking trips to sacred places. As there were no roads and buses in those days, so the Jatras to distant shrines would take a week or so and the pilgrims would sing the Jatra songs while negotiating the hill fronts criss-crossed by streams and cliffs called Naher and Kuolu in Pahari. Kanshi Ram's famous song Baba Bolah Nath Kareri Phangad' is one such Jatra song for pilgrims visiting the Shrine of famous Siddho-Bawa Bolah Nath in Hamirpur District and a place called DEUT SIDDHA, nearly 55 kilomeres from Nadaun. The song captures the appeal of Baba Bolah Nath and depicts the hold he has on his

devotees. It also shows the Siddha granting the wishes of his devotees. Interestingly enough, the women devotees are supposed to salute the statue of Baba Ji from a distance. As he is a Brahmachari, who is wrept in meditation, so only menfolk can touch his feet. The Siddha, however, does not discriminate in granting the boons-fulfilling the wishes and blessees all devotees men, women and children-all alike.

Journeys to the Shrine of Baba Bolah Nath are popularly called Pandhari in Pahari and the vow sung in his temple after the fulfilment of the desired goal is called SUKHNA—a happy fulfilment. Kanshi Ram has given a detailed account of such fulfillments-SUKHNAS.

CHAPTER VIII

The social reformer

IT HAS ALREADY been observed that Baba Ji had a passion for social reform. He did not like the society steeped in tradition and sought to reform it continuously. His association with Arya Samaj made him a strong advocate of widow-remarriage and the abolition of untouchability. Here his political and social reform programmes converged on a single ideal—a society free from child marriage, ready to accept the remarriage of widows and the uplift of Harijans. Added to this was the powerful contribution he made to the village reform popularly called 'Dehat Sudhar' in these days. The stress on the use of Swadeshi was a particular passion with him and so was the desire to reform the society. One such poem in Hindi on Swadeshi is poems and songs in villages and towns propagating these ideals to reform the society. One such poem in Hindi on Swadeshi is reproduced here as an illustration :

**"Mera ho tan Swadeshi
Mera ho man Swadeshi.
Choti se ho charan tak sara badan Swadeshi.
Gharbar ho Swadeshi, Iswar ki gar daya ho,
Kashmir se Kumari tak ho Vatan Swadeshi.
Desi vichar mere, Bharat Sudhar Sochan.
Ho shudh or nirmal mera chalan Swadeshi.
Aisi ho ye Swadeshi, is se ho meri priti.
Bharat ke waste ho jiwan maran Swadeshi.
Dhalphal kon Swadeshi, Bharat ke Gulstan ke.**

**Balbul bhi ho Swadeshi, Aur ho chann Swadeshi.
Jab tak jisen, Badan par Shrinagar ho Swadeshi.
Mar Jaeen to bhi ho mera kaphan Swadeshi".**

**(May! my body and mind be imbued with the spirit of
Swadeshi.**

From tip to toes Swadeshi should be the guiding spirit.

**If God be kind, may my house reflect the Swadeshi
Spirit.**

**Let the things of mine be attuned to this spirit think
of reforming India.**

**Let my conduct and character reflect the purity of
Swadeshi.**

Let such Swadeshi spirit be eternally with me.

Let me live and die in the cause of Swadeshi.

Let the garden of India bloom with Swadeshi flowers

Let the nightingale sing this spirit in the garden for ever.

**Let me be adorned with Swadeshi till the last breath of
my life.**

**And when I die let my body be wrapped in Swadeshi
shroud.**

The boycott of courts and the passionate call for the boycott of foreign goods was only matched by his desire to open national schools. It is thus obvious that he along with the other freedom fighters of his region as also the stalwarts like Lala Lajpat Rai, worked for the opening of National Schools and colleges in the then Punjab. The religious organisations like the D.A.V. College Management Committee, the Arya Pratini-dhi Sabha (Gurukul Section) and the Sanatan Dharam Sabha had already started opening privately managed schools where religious teaching and moral instruction were added to the courses prescribed by the Government. These schools, it may be added, also provided a free regular system of prayers in praise of God and also included the spirit of patriotism, vegetarianism, hatred for drinking, love for Swadeshi above all

managed to introduce the teaching of Hindi and Sanskrit languages whereas in the Govt. of District Board Schools only English, Urdu and Persian were taught.

These schools proved very popular and drew children from all castes. The public donated in cash and kind for setting up these schools and for constructing their buildings. In these days people thought that any donation to an educational institution was an act of punya (merit) and the rich and the well to do would like to associate the names of their ancestors with the schools or the buildings constructed wholly or partly to house such buildings. It is interesting to record that on such lines such schools were started after caste names. So S. D. High Schools were opened in the famous village called GARLI in Dehra tehsil and another was to be opened later in DADA SIBA itself to be taken over by the Punjab Government later, after the attainment of independence. By a special resolution of the Punjab Assembly, when Pt. Amar Nath Vidyalankar was the Minister for Education and Shri Pratap Singh Kairon, was the Chief Minister, the school was named after Baba Ji, as Kanshi Ram Memorial High School, Dada Siba. The national urge for an indigenous system of education had been responsible for notable educational reform and resulted in the opening of such notable institutions as Visawa Bharati of Shantiniketan (W.B.) by Gurudev Ravindra Nath Tagore, the Gurukul Kangri at Hardwar (UP) by Swami Sharadhanand, a chain of D.A.V. colleges at Lahore and elsewhere by the Arya Samaj leaders like Lala Hans Raj and the setting up of a number of National schools and colleges like at Lahore and elsewhere by Lala Lajpat Rai. Needless to mention that these educational institutions became the breeding ground for national pride and revolutionary spirit. Bhagat Singh and his comrades were the products of such institutions. Mahatma Gandhi had already launched his famous 'NAITALIM' at WRDHA. Shri Madan Mohan Malaviya had set up the

Benaras Hindu University and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan-Aligarh Muslim University, and Anagarik Dharampal Mahabodh School (SARNATH). Baba Kanshi Ram encouraged the setting up of such institutions in Kangra and Hoshiarpur Districts. Attached as he was to Dayanand SALVATION Mission, headed by Principal Devi Chand, he utilised his influence in setting up and promoting such institutions as D.A.V. High School Daulatpur Chauk, Hoshiapur (now Una District) and S. D. High Schools in the length and breadth of Kangra District. It is important to mention the fact that one of the roles played actively by Baba Ji was to persuade the parents of all castes to send their children to such privately managed schools. The political activist as he was, Kanshi Ram never lagged behind in lending a helping hand on such noble causes as the opening of national or private schools, setting up of orphanages and helping the widows financially and also in getting remarried. It is difficult to imagine the difficulties in his way especially when he met with strong opposition from the orthodox sections of Indian Society in the backward hilly regions. In addition to opposition-a social reformer has also to be the victim of humiliation and ridicule which are the permanent share for all social reformers. Pahari Gandhi was no exception to this general rule and had his share in ample measure. The mission and zeal displayed by Kanshi Ram for this purpose drew adequate response, inspite of the stiff opposition from the high-ups. He records in his diary how on 21 February 1922, one such meeting held at Village GURNWAR in Tehsil Dehra, discussed this subject and elicited adequate response from the people present on the occasion especially when it was explained to them that the children would imbibe their culture and tradition only through education at such schools which were accepted to be truly national in character. Writing in this context, about the harm done to our cultural tradition by the Govt. Schools,

the famous poet Akbar Allahabadi had said in his famous satire :

**"BACH-ON MEN BU KYON KAR HO MAN BAP
KE KARDAR KE DOODH TO DIBBE KA HAI,
TALIM HAI SARKAR KI"**

(How can the noble character of parents be reflected in children whom they feed on powdered milk and are educated as Government schools ?)

CHAPTER IX

The man

WHAT KIND OF a man Kanshi emerges after the struggles and tribulations of life. A father who never bothered about the upkeep and education of his children or a husband who never thought of any duty towards his wife. It is true that the freedom fighters of these days had to forego the comforts of their lives, and forget everything about their wives and children. Yet there are enough details which show that Kanshi was fond of his wife and remained dedicated to her throughout his life. Though his married life was only for a span of 27 years, yet he thought his wife Saraswati Devi was for him a natural source of inspiration. He thought that she was partner in his crusade against slavery, even though when she was dead. In a poem beginning 'O Sajni—ni bhejiya koi Sneha' (O Darling why have you not sent a word) he complains about the lack of any communication with his wife even on the day of remembrance "Shradh". But even when she was alive, he would write poems from the jail calling her not to lose heart in the hour of trial and tribulation. He asks her not to be afraid of taking loan :

**"TUN Qarje te ni dariyan,
Koi khauf ni khaiyan,
Apne faraz nibhaiyan,
Dile par pathar rakhi ne"**

A fine husband but true, dutiful and obedient son, Kanshi remembers his mother and addresses her as such :—

**“Jugan jugan de Ehsan jo,
Mere par tun kite,
Kya unhan da badla deyan,
Minjo Aman apne pairan di mitti de !
(So much have you done for me in ages past)
How can I recompense you for it ?
Mother, let me touch the dust of your feet !**

The son had no time to serve the mother. He only remembers her after death. As a husband he has no time to look after the comforts of his wife. As a father he leaves his son to their fate ! What kind of a man was this Kanshi Ram ?

Surrounded by grief and sorrow, flitting in and out of jail, as he always was, we have in him a true hero who remained detached throughout his life. Mention has already been made of his first arrest when he was performing certain funeral rites which occur every four years after the death of a near and dear one. He just pushed his young son aside to proceed to jail. Is it a cruel heart that pushes aside a son like this ?

Perhaps, yes, and perhaps not. Years later Kanshi was to write a letter to his son—perhaps the last one of his life written on 14 September, 1943 addressed to his elder son Gian Chand which runs :

**“My dear Gian Chand,
Ashirbad.**

I have not received any letter from you since long. You did not even reply to my letter. As you were ill, so I am extremely worried. Do inform me about your health immediately. It is silly not to give the

latest information, after communicating about illness. Swaya Ram has also not informed me about his welfare after Masya reached Dalhousie.

You may be angry, but I have purchased a cow for Rs. thirty (Rs. 30/-). Earlier, the yield of milk was 3 seers, but now it has increased to 4 seers. These days a buffalo is priced at Rs. fifty only (Rs. 50/-). The price of cow has to be paid in October positively. Hence do not send me any amount in September.

Please send me your horoscope. Only God knows how I feel about you. Only He will help !

Sd/- Kanshi Ram

It clearly illustrates his concern for the health of his ailing son and reminds him of his duty to inform the father about his state of health, after he had been informed about his illness.

The letter also indicates that elder son Gain Chand had not been married till then and Kanshi Ram was not happy with him, but he wanted to arrange his marriage by consulting his horoscope.

Baba Kanshi Ram's letters throw a great deal of light on his personal and family life. He had no second income to yield him regular profits. His frequent visits to the jails had ruined whatever little business there was in the small shop. He was not paid by any rich man or industrialist. Some time he would get a few rupees as honorarium from the Widow Aid Society, (Vidhwa Sahayak Sabha), Hoshiarpur or Dayanand Salvation Mission, Hoshiarpur—where he appealed for widow remarriage or for Harijan uplift. His sons were not given any proper education and thus could not get any job. Whatever land Baba Ji had was mortgaged by him in 1929 with a moneylender. What-

ever little money there was had been exhausted in paying fines which were frequently imposed on him. At one time he had no money to pay even fine like one anna, as was the case when a Magistrate fined him for this amount at Dehra and paid it from his own pocket to set him free.

The letters written by the colleagues about him to his relatives also throw some light on his life and personality. One such letter written by Shri Krishan Chand Puri, Secretary, Distt. Congress Committee, Kangra at Dharamsala on 10 June, 1941 to Shri Swaya Ram, gives a vivid picture of the penury through which Baba Ji was passing. It mentions that Baba Ji had been arrested on 7 June 1941 at Dehra. One day Baba Ji gave, his son's (Swaya Ram) a letter to Shri Puri and asked him to read it. The letter, says Shri Puri, was extremely painful. He told me that he would not reply to this letter as he did not have five paise for buying an envelope.

Another letter written to Swaya Ram on 18 April 1943 speaks of the stomachache suffered from. He could not get it cured even after taking a good deal of medicines and other treatment. He has been confined to his bed and is unable to move. But strong willed as he was, he assured his son that the end was still far away and as such he should not be afraid.

To some extent Baba Ji liked to prepare and prescribe medicines. Thus, he worked as an amateur Vaidya, some sort of a free physician to cure them from minor ailments. Perhaps this was also the line of his ancestors and his son continues to carry on the profession.

One of the great passions Baba Ji had was to meet people in their villages by walking on foot. He was thus a great traveller who walked on foot from Dehra to Mandi, Simla, Dalhousie, Dharamsala, Hamirpur, Nadaun and other places, time and again. These unending, travels enriched his experiences of

men and matters on one hand and also emboldened him in his crusade for making Pahari popular, whereas the rulers of the day spoke and wrote in chaste Urdu and high flown English and the friends admired Sanskrit. Baba Ji employed his mother tongue, Pahari for public meetings, writing poems and songs and thus arouse the masses. The script that he used for this purpose was Persian as he had studied Urdu at the school. Though he also could read and write Hindi in Devnagri script and was conversant with Tankri script as it was used for Pahari in those days, yet the medium of communication for him with the masses was Pahari in the Kangri dialect. Needless to say that the employment of Pahari as the medium of public speeches was the cause of his popularity and endeared him to the masses. Whereas the other leaders employed Urdu, Persian and English to impress their audiences in public speeches, he in his turn utilised the rhythm and sweetaess of Pahari idiom and utilised the music of this beautiful language of the hill and vales in arousing the masses to a tough struggle against the foreigners.

It has been noted earlier that he was extremely fond of music and used to compose songs and lyrics in Pahari and set them to tune. In this regard he regularly visited Hari-ballabh Sangeet Mela, which was held annually at Jalandhar and met the colleagues there. At Lahore his visits to the meetings of the Sangeet Sabha were as regular as they could be. The songs that he composed were mostly on patriotic and religious thems but some times he rewrote the folk ballards—kunju & Chanchlo, Chartru and Resho etc. to add a romantic touch to an otherwise dull and dreary situation. His sharp sense of beauty and harmony always inspired him to write songs and poems which ultimately swayed the masses. But he gave equal importance to the classical music and often spent hours in practising the famous classical bhajans

An Estimate

What kind of a man Kanshi Ram emerges ultimately from the heroic struggles he launched sometime singlehandedly and at others in co-operation with his colleagues ? It is a question very difficult to answer as though he was getting the co-operation of his friends, relatives and colleagues in the freedom struggle, in many other fields of his activity he was the lone way farer—the pioneer. In his love for Pahari language, in his passion for the promotion of its literature, in his ability to employ the folk idiom, in his capacity to link the prevailing situation to the ancient past through a series of powerful images and historical events, myths and legends—he was far ahead of his times in addition to being the only one such powerful personality of his age.

The total impact can thus be well imagined. It was at Daulatpur Chowk in Tehsil Una (now Distt.) that the audience refused to listen to other Speakers when Sarojini Naidu too was present. He had to be called upon to speak as his melodious and sonorous voice, the music of his fluent speech, earned him the title-BULBULE-E-PAHAR (Nightingale of the hills) from her.

On other occasions he could convey a powerful thought or suggestion through subtle imagery as was the case when he referred to the dwindling fortunes and the likely collapse of the British empire by saying :

“ANGREZ SARKARA DA TIGHA PAR DHIARA”

Perhaps in the wide range of his interests as a freedom fighter and social reformer he has aptly been described by the

title Pahari Gandhi. But it is a poet and author that he compleys comparison with Bhartri Hari of Sanskrit who wrote 'Shringar Satkam' on one hand and the "Vairagya Satkam" on the other. Having experienced the pangs of love he could call upon the palanquin bearers to move a bit slowly so that he could have a few more glimpses of his beloved

"O DOLI CHUKDE KAHARO HAULI HAULI CHALA KANSHI DI BIR GAYI"

or the bewitching description of beauty conjured up to describe the unparalled youth and freshness of the face of Ashok's Queen, while approaching her stepson are all remarkable.

But so are also the glimpses of pain and sorrow that darken his thoughts and pierce his heart. Having seen four to five deaths in his own family and the corpses being lifted and carried for cremation simultaneously the loss of near and dear ones had made an indelible impression upon his heart. He describes how painful is the birth of a poem :

"Mane n mere kai jhhakar uthde.
Angan mereyan kulbul hunda.
Khialan wich dhuen uthde.
Bhanti badlan de chhai jande O !
Phiri-dardan de pahare ne Takrai jande.
Tan anjuan di barkha lagi paundi.
Bundan Bundan jammii kane.
Rup akhran da bani janda O !

(Many feelings surge in my heart.
My limbs begin to tremble.
My thoughts appear to be enveloped in smoke.
They wrap me up like clouds dark !
Then-they strike against the rocks of pain
They freeze into tiny drops.
And take the form of syllables)

It is not something comparable to verses from Bhartri Hari in pain and pathos ?

It appears that the poet in him was wrestling hard with the freedom fighter in him. The tender heart was continuously clashing against an idomitable will struggling to liberate the motherland. The beauty of the hills and vales of Kangra region, the murmuring music of its crystal streams, the wails and cries of the human hearts in the face of death and despair constantly reminded him of the far receding horizons of the ideals which demanded not only total dedication but supreme sacrifice. The pangs of separation from this world of charm and love were matched only by the higher and distant ideals of sacrifice, which ultimately lend a meaning to all life and transform it in eternity :

**"Azadi mangdi e Qurbanian Jo
Kya Karna e Zindgaman jo ?
(Freedom calls for sacrifice
What else is life worth for ?")**

**"Jahlu men tuhate judai leni
Tahlu phullan de e phullio bagh
Eh Gawahi dinge.**

Men jagte ne pyar kita tha.

Jine da sar sacha paya.

Har din pyar kita.

Is such-e Jo houn janda.

Is jo maut ni chhundi"

(When I shall bid you farewell.

The blooming gardens shall then speak for me.

I loved this world intensely.

I discovered the meaning of this life—

By raining my love daily on one and all

I felt this eternal truth in my heart

How could my death touch it with decay ?)

Fame and name had made Kanshi Ram a legend in his own life time. But, perhaps the generations will acclaim him equally great as a pioneer Pahari poet and as prominent freedom fighter. His crowning and lasting achievement perhaps, would lie in enriching and strengthening Pahari Language and literature by writing over 500 poems and songs on a variety of themes ranging from historical events like the blinding of Ashoka's son Kunal to the current issues like freedom struggle, starvation and poverty. He would dominate the pages of history like a prophet who led a whole generation through a period of struggle and crisis and inspired them as much by his powerful personality as by his eloquent speech and melodious voice. Who would determine where in exactly did the magnetism of his personality lie ? Whether in the prophetic and melodious voice or in his striding tones and their strong content ? Perhaps it lay in a harmonious synthesis of both.

Chronological sketch

(1)	1882 (11 July)	Birth at Village Padhyoli; Mauza Gurnwar P. O. Dada Siba, Teh : Dehra, Distt. Kangra.
(2)	1885	Enrolment in Lower Middle Schcol Dada Siba.
(3)	1890	Married to Smt. Saraswati Devi aged 5 years.
(4)	1893	Father Shri Lakhnoo Ram died.
(5)	1894	Mother Smt. Rewati Devi died.
(6)	1898	Visit to Lahore.
(7)	1905	Earthquake in Kangra—Accompanied Lala Lajpat Rai for relief work.
(8)	1906	Meeting with Sufi Amiba Prashad & S.Ajit Singh and Maulana Barkat Ullah.
(9)	1911 (23rd Dec.)	Visit to Delhi Durbar. Lord Hardinge bombed.
(10)	1913	Birth of elder son Gian Chand.
(11)	1917	Birth of second son Swaya Ram.
(12)	1918	Death of wife—Smt. Saraswati Devi.
(13)	1920 (20 August)	First arrest and jailed later.
(14)	1922 (11 March)	Release from jail.

Appendix

KANGRA DES

The hill folk are confused
Kangra region will face ruin.
The men of the plains are well awake
The people of Kangra are all asleep.
We have such beautiful features
But cutting the grass,
collecting the firewood,
Grazing the cattle,
Have all reduced us to fools,
These burdens have sapped our strength
We run into litigation without delay !
So will Kangra region face ruin
We shirk the hard work
Even now listen to Kanshi's call !
Be not afraid of kissing the gallows ?
We will soon attain Swaraj.

NIKKE NIKKE MAHNUAN JO

To The Short Statured Menfolk !

The short statured men folk have to lead
A life of want and pain
How difficult is it to make both ends meet ?
How can they lead their life in ease ?

Three poems of Baba Kanshi Ram, written in Pahari are given after translation

The members of the family have nothing to stomach
 How can they fall asleep ?
 Some time they turn their heads
 Around the pillow without sleep
 Some times they roll beyond
 When there is nothing to fall upon
 How can they make both ends meet ?
 The short statured men folk have to lead.
 A life of want and pain

NAZAR GHUMADI AGGE PICHHEN

I Look Before And After

I cast a glance towards the plight of
 King Dehar's daughter
 Towards Prithvi Raj and Jai Chand
 How did the politics have a swing ?
 How came that religion and politics were mixed ?
 So we all became irreligious !
 Then I look towards Maharana Pratap
 At the daring of his horse—Chetak
 Then I view Shiva Ji Maharaj
 I take into account the heroic tones of
 Poet 'Kavi Rai' and alongwith him
 I appreciate Kabir, Rahim & Surdas
 Who removed all bad customs
 Preached the concept of One God
 And gave the wonderful Message.

* * * * *

(2).

Then I cast my eyes
 On the rulers full of fanaticism and cruelty
 Who showered terror on one and all
 Who raised the storms of persecution
 Destroyed the chastity of our ladies.
 Tortured the Sitas and Draupdis of the days.

Who produced the rivers of blood
 Raised the storms of hardship.
 This situation brought about the birth of patriots
 Brought forth the heroes of this age,
 Heroes were they—the Gurus of Punjab
 Guru Arjundev—Guru Tegh Bahadur
 and Bhai Mati Das !
 Guru Gobind Singh brought about a new awakening
 But traitor Gangu was also there !

(3)

Banda Vir Bahadur gave a new call !
 The Turks fled—The Pathans fled
 The Moghuls were drowned in a sea of sorrow !
 Then came the Portugese and then followed the French & Dutch
 They failed to hold fast.
 Then came the English for trade
 At first it was the beginning—then it started flourishing.
 They captured Bengal in East
 They conquered the Southern States
 Then reached the city of Delhi.
 The Moghuls rolled in luxury
 And limitless was their greed
 The British captured Delhi after all !
 No son of woman born
 Could cry a halt to their onward march.
 Then dawned Eighteen fifty seven !
 The sun was lost in darkness
 The dark shadows of Rahu & Ketu loomed large !
 Kanshi too was upset at such a turn of events
 The reign of terror was let loose
 The British flourished from day to day
 The traitors joined hands
 A New sun dawned
 A new faith was born

This was the patriotic fervour
 A new wave arose
 On seeing the pool of blood
 Around Mother's wounds !
 Many torches were lit around
 They continued to burn
 They never were extinguished.
 Yet a few Gorkha and Sikh Rajas
 For their small selfish ends
 Betrayed the Motherland !
 But the lamp of freedom did not go out !
 Nana Tatia and Rani Jhansi
 Became immortals for their heroic role !

(4)

A single drop of Martyr's blood
 Gave rise to countless Ganges of gore
 Kanshi too had a dip in this sacred stream.
 And thus sanctified the mission of his life.
 Even the hermits and saints took up the cause of freedom
 And fought for it.
 Thousands of them lost their lives.
 The Kukas staged a revolt.
 The British were upset once again.
 The revolutionaries resorted to shooting
 They sailed towards the shores of the Motherland
 In Kamagatamaru
 The British opened fire at Jallianwala Bagh
 Instituted the Lahore conspiracy case
 Harassed the people of Budge Budge
 Barisal, Dhakka & Ajmer

Chittagong, Maiman Singh and opened fire
 At Nasik, Manaktalle, Tannevali
 Kushia, Commilla & Madanpur
 Then rose Babar Akalis and Violence was there at Shalimar
 There was Indo-German Conspiracy

(5)

Madras Bomb case and Ooty.....case in Tamilnadu
 Then Bhagat Singh & Dutta hurled a Bomb
 In the corridors of Power—Central Assembly.
 The Govt. started the Lahore conspiracy case,
 Rajguru Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev
 Kissed the gallows for the motherland.
 A month later Kanshi commenced
 A life long mourning by wearing black clothes,
 A few years later came 1942
 In Quit India Movement
 Kanshi entered jail again and gave
 His message to the nation—

“Let us sacrifice our life
 Let it not be disgraced
 The heroes are born only once
 The fair names of mother and father
 Call for sacrifices
 The nation calls|the motherland beckons !
 The life belongs to them
 Let us fill the jails again !

After having bowed at the temple of our village gods !



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